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SUB-COMMISSION ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9TH MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 24 March 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SIMKHADA (Nepal)

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RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION (continued)

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GE.00-12087 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION (agenda item 6) (E/CN.4/2000/15, 16 and Add.1, 17 and 134; E/CN.4/2000/NGO/18, 28, 30, 53, 69, 102 and 122; E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/7 and Add.1 and 8; A/54/347) (continued)

1. Ms. NASCIBENE DE DUMONT (Argentina) expressed her delegation's dissatisfaction with the late publication and distribution of the Special Rapporteur's report.

2. The information available on agenda item 6 only served to increase the international community's concern and fully justified the holding of the World Conference against Racism in 2001. Intolerance, discrimination, xenophobia, conflicts involving minorities and the dissemination of ideologies based on racial hatred and scorn varied in their intensity and ranged from latent or covert forms through the worst excesses, such as ethnic cleansing.

3. Whatever their form, such manifestations were found everywhere, including Argentina, although the cases there were sporadic and isolated. Argentina's periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination described the legislative and administrative measures adopted to face the problem, which were aimed primarily at establishing punishment and determining the amount to be awarded as compensation in discrimination cases, setting severe sentences for racist offences and punishing the advocates of racial superiority.

4. However, efforts should not be limited to punishment, but must focus on prevention of such occurrences, which wore away the social fabric. National institutions and Ombudsmen played an important role in monitoring such phenomena and strengthening tolerance, equality and democratic values.

5. Combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination was an area particularly conducive to international solidarity, in which the experience of some could serve to help all. For that reason, the Argentine Republic fully supported the holding of the World Conference and welcomed the fact that it was taking place in South Africa, which had become the champion of anti-racist action in everyone's eyes. Argentina had also accepted with pleasure the offer of the Government of Brazil to host the regional preparatory meeting.

6. Mr. NAVIKAS (Observer for Lithuania) said that Lithuania aligned itself with the European Union statement on the issue of racism. Lithuania was a party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the principles contained in the Convention were included in its legal system. Lithuania had also acceded to other international instruments on racism, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

7. The Department of National Minorities and Regional Problems, responsible for formulating and implementing State policy on relations between national minorities and ethnic groups, had been established in 1989. Lithuanian law allowed national minorities tc establish public and cultural organizations and political parties. At present there were three political organizations representing national minorities: the Lithuanian Polish Election Action, the

Lithuanian Russian Union and the Lithuanian Citizens' Alliance. Eighteen minorities had their own organizations. There were already more than 220 public organizations representing national minorities or ethnic groups in Lithuania, as opposed to 60 in 1993.

8. The Gypsies, Karaites and Tatars were classified as ethnic groups in Lithuania, as they did not have national States. Their ancestors had settled in Lithuania many centuries before. The State's programme for the commemoration of the six hundredth anniversary of the Tatars' and Karaites' settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a sign of the authorities' interest in the history of those groups.

9. To combat racism and intolerance, the Lithuanian authorities attempted to promote dialogue not only among ethnic groups, but among civilizations as well. With that in mind, they were organizing an International Conference on Dialogue among Civilizations, to be held under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Lithuania and the Director-General of UNESCO in 2001.

10. The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, held from 26 to 28 January 2000, had been an important contribution to the struggle against racism, xenophobia and intolerance. As a follow-up to the Conference, in October 2000 Lithuania would be organizing an international forum on the looted cultural property of Holocaust victims.

11. Mr. PELEG (Observer for Israel) said he would dedicate his remarks to the memory of Ambassador Morris Abram, Chairperson of UN Watch, who had passed away a week earlier. Morris Abram had dedicated his life to the fight against racism and anti-Semitism and had been instrumental in the Commission's adoption of the resolution condemning anti-Semitism.

12. Having been born in Israel, then under British mandate, in the course of the Second World War, he owed his survival to the fact that the German army's march eastward in North Africa had been stopped at El Alamein by the British Eighth Army commanded by Field Marshal Montgomery. His parents' generation had hoped that, after the war and the liberation of the concentration camps, anti-Semitism would come to an end. Unfortunately that had not been so. In recent years especially, the world had been witnessing a rise in anti-Semitic attitudes; there were efforts to deny that the Holocaust had ever occurred and the concentration camps were portrayed as "punishment camps", as if the inmates had been criminals.

13. It was true that there were many differences between the situation in the 1930s and 1940s and the current situation. The most important one was the existence of the State of Israel, which was the ultimate response to Auschwitz and expressed the redemption of the Jewish people. Pope John Paul II, who had recently visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, had reiterated his condemnation of anti-Semitism and racism and emphasized the need to remember, for a purpose, namely to ensure that never again would evil prevail, as it had for millions of innocent victims of Nazism.

14. He welcomed the initiative of the Prime Minister of Sweden, who in January 2000 had convened the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, in which heads of State or Ministers from 43 countries had participated. In the Declaration adopted at the end of

the Conference, the participants had pledged to strengthen their efforts to promote remembrance and research about the Holocaust and encourage study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions.

15. The recent rise of extreme right movements in Europe was of great concern. The question raised was whether the success of those movements in certain countries was linked to the measures those States had taken or had failed to take in the wake of the Holocaust. If there was a linkage, it underlined the importance of educating the young generation to know what had happened and to dedicate themselves to ensuring that it would never happen again. The Government of Israel hoped that the World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance would contribute to the fight against racism and anti-Semitism.

16. Mr. CUELLO CAMILLO (Observer for the Dominican Republic) welcomed the holding of the forthcoming World Conference and noted that States which were former colonies had particular experience on the issue of racism.

17. The Dominican Republic, a tropical country in the Caribbean, was the product of a racial and cultural mix. The Dominican Republic and Haiti shared the former island of Hispaniola, first a Spanish colony and later occupied in the west by the French, which had given rise to two ethnically and culturally distinct nations. The first nation had received populations brought from Africa to work on the plantations, and had become the first Black republic in the world. The second nation, the Dominican Republic, had gained independence in the mid-nineteenth century. Interbreeding and the incorporation of indigenous, African and Spanish population groups had given rise to a Creole population, basically identified as mulatto.

18. Although the racial issue had been exacerbated by dictator Rafael Trujillo from 1930 to 1961, the Dominican Republic was now characterized by harmonious coexistence among the various racial groups. At no moment, either before or after the dictatorship, had racial discrimination been a component of State policy. Naturally that did not mean that there had been no individual acts of discrimination. However, discrimination in the Dominican Republic was social and economic rather than racial.

19. The gap in the economic positions of the two neighbouring republics, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, led to illegal immigration by Haitian citizens towards the Dominican Republic in search of a better life. The presence of such immigrants created sensitive situations which could give rise to forms of racial discrimination and xenophobia. The Governments of the two republics, led by Leonel Fernández and René Préval respectively, were aware of those difficulties. They were endeavouring to gain better control over Haitian immigration and to guarantee Haitians' fundamental rights. The bi-national Dominican Republic-Haiti Commission had held numerous meetings on that subject. In the domestic sphere, a draft law on immigration was before the national Congress and should replace the law which had been in force since 1939.

20. The Dominican Republic, which was a signatory of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, supported the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure the success of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

21. Ms. VIVAS (Observer for Uruguay) said that the convening of the World Conference against Racism provided an opportunity to renew commitments to combating racism at the national, regional and international levels. She welcomed the fact that the World Conference was being hosted by South Africa and that the Government of Brazil was organizing the preparatory meeting for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean. The first meeting of the preparatory committee, to be held in early May, would be an important step. For its part, the Government of Uruguay had sponsored a seminar convened by the organization Mundo Afro for representatives of Black organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. The seminar had been held in Montevideo from 13 to 19 March 2000.

22. Mr. STROHAL (Observer for Austria) said that the principle of non-discrimination was a cornerstone of Austria's human rights policy both domestically and in international affairs. While subscribing to the European Union statement, he would also like to point out some specific elements of the Austrian Government's commitment to combating racism.

23. The Austrian authorities placed particular emphasis on the education of children and adults for fostering tolerance and pluralism. Every member of civil society and politicians in particular had a responsibility in defending those values. In Austria, special human rights programmes were undertaken in the schools, for pupils, teachers, the police and the judiciary. The Government of Austria was participating actively in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism and the regional preparatory meeting organized by the Council of Europe; it was honoured to be entrusted with chairing the Preparatory Committee.

24. The protection of ethnic or religious minorities was high on the agenda of Austria's domestic and foreign policy. Austrian legislation contained a range of provisions ensuring not only non-discrimination, but also the criminalization of racial insults or incitement to racial hatred. In addition, a specific constitutional amendment bound all Austrian legislation and practice to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In addition to the judiciary, a wide range of institutions ensured the application of laws prohibiting discrimination. Several funds and programmes had been established to ensure the harmonious integration of foreigners into Austrian society.

25. Notwithstanding those efforts, problems persisted, in Austria as in many other countries, in Europe and elsewhere. The Austrian Government was committed to taking effective measures to combat racism and xenophobia. In its statement of 4 February, it had committed itself to taking vigorous steps to counter every way of thinking which sought to denigrate human beings and to ensure full respect for the rights of people of any nationality living in Austria.

26. That commitment was based on a long-standing humanitarian tradition. Over the past decades, Austria had provided a new home to people fleeing persecution, totalitarian regimes and war. They now constituted nearly 10 per cent of Austria's overall population. In the last few years alone, Austria had provided protection to many refugees. It had received more than 100,000 displaced persons following the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia, proportionally more than any other Western European country. Austria remained committed to its humanitarian tradition and would maintain its openness to the world. Given the complexity of Austria's history in the twentieth century, the Government felt a special responsibility to combat all forms of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia.

27. Mr. ZAFERA (Madagascar) said that his delegation had read with interest the documents under the current agenda item; he commended the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its work in preparing the World Conference against Racism. The success of the Conference would largely depend on the proper conduct of the preparatory process. Worthy of mention were the Office's consultations and research on the use of Internet to incite racial hatred and the opening of an Internet site on the preparations for the World Conference. His delegation welcomed Senegal's offer to host the preparatory meeting for the African region and expressed appreciation for the active participation of the Ambassador of Senegal, Ms. Absa Claude Diallo.

28. The re-emergence of different forms of racism throughout the world was a source of deep concern. Pernicious and violent forms of racism had appeared in countries which boasted a long-standing tradition of liberalism; other, more subtle, forms were appearing, for example in employment or housing. The international community must act forcefully to ensure that those manifestations of racism did not continue, much less flourish, and must not underestimate the danger represented by the use of Internet for racist propaganda.

29. His delegation welcomed the conclusions and recommendations in the report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mr. Glèlè-Ahanhanzo. It also supported the activities of the International Labour Office to eliminate discrimination in employment or occupation on the basis of race, colour or national origin.

30. Action to combat racism and racial discrimination was a long-term undertaking, in which not only Governments, but also the different actors of civil society and the media must take part. Given its insularity and the racial mix of its population, Madagascar was unaware of the very notion of race as a criterion for differentiating human beings. It was a party to numerous international human rights instruments, had enshrined the defence of human dignity in its Constitution and rejected discrimination on any basis whatsoever. Its rejection of discrimination was reflected in the Penal Code.

31. Three decades of effort since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 3057 (XXVIII) on 2 November 1973 had not been sufficient to eliminate racism and racial discrimination. The international community must protect future generations from their harmful effects; for that reason, it must act decisively to combat the re-emergence of certain racist ideologies.

32. Mr. AMORIM (Brazil) reaffirmed his Government's willingness to participate in the World Conference at all levels, in an effort to identify problems and promote the rights and fundamental freedoms of the human race. As recently stated in the report of a seminar held in Bellagio, Italy, there was only one race, the human race. That was the only race which must be defended at all costs.

33. In an age of globalization and increasing awareness of a common destiny, there could be no place for prejudice, stereotyping and intolerance. However, no society had yet reached a state where exclusion or preference based on colour or origin had entirely disappeared.

34. Despite continuing advances - the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa was a major accomplishment - serious efforts were required to deal with the multiple contemporary expressions of intolerance. New forms of ethnic violence plagued societies in transition and old tribal rivalries were exploited for political gain in many places, including Brazil. The promotion of equality and respect for diversity worldwide required a universal approach.

35. Brazil had offered to host the regional preparatory meeting for the World Conference. The meeting would provide an opportunity to raise the level of awareness of the general public with regard to the objectives of the Conference and identify its priorities. In addition, the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference, to be held immediately after the Commission's session, should provide some orientation for the regional process. Organizational aspects, including the issue of financial assistance for the regional preparatory meetings and the question of ensuring as wide participation of NGOs as possible, should also be dealt with during the preparatory process.

36. The disturbing re-emergence of certain trends raised the question of the compatibility between xenophobic political platforms and good governance and democracy. As numerous international instruments indicated, the banner of freedom of expression could not be used to conceal the propagation of racist attitudes. The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination stated that government policies based on ideas of racial superiority or hatred violated fundamental human rights, endangered friendly relations among peoples, undermined cooperation among nations and threatened international peace and security.

37. It was worth considering whether the mechanisms of the Commission and the treaty bodies should not delve more deeply into the implications of racist political trends, not only from the point of view of combating intolerance, but also as a way of promoting democracy and good governance.

38. It was most unsettling that, half a century after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, racism and xenophobia were again on the rise. His delegation believed that that serious problem must be one of the world's priorities, and it wholeheartedly supported the High Commissioner's efforts as Secretary-General of the Conference. Given its political, social and ethical implications, the World Conference against Racism stood as a major international event, capable of drawing upon the lessons of the past to set the new century on a sustained course of transformations that would benefit all of humanity.

39. Ms. DIALLO (Senegal) recalled her remark, at the Round Table organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, that in all parts of the world racism continued its insidious undermining process, progressively corrupting human minds. For that reason Senegal had campaigned actively, in December 1997, for the convening of the third World Conference against Racism in 2001.

40. Ironically, at a time when integration was occurring worldwide, thanks in particular to scientific and technological progress, fear and denial of others were taking on alarming

proportions, political groupings in certain countries were openly based on racism and xenophobia, and religious and political intolerance, hatred of foreigners and a culture of racial superiority remained a major threat to human civilization.

41. The time had therefore come for collective introspection in an effort to root out ideas of racial or ethnic superiority and xenophobia. In that connection, Senegal could only express its regret at the lack of interest shown in the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, and placed its hopes in the World Conference to be hosted by South Africa in 2001. No effort should be spared to mobilize national and international public opinion in favour of the objectives of the Conference. Emphasis should be placed on education and awareness-raising and the use of modern information technologies, in particular Internet, whose use for the propagation of racist and anti-Semitic material should be condemned.

42. Senegal had offered to host the regional African Meeting for the World Conference, convinced as it was that any form of discrimination was the very negation of the principle of equality among all.

43. Mr. GALLEGOS (Ecuador) said that the organization of the World Conference against Racism and the launching of the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination bore witness to the will of the international community to combat a scourge which affected all countries, whatever their level of development, in all spheres - economic, social, cultural and political - as shown in the report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (E/CN.4/2000/16 and Add.1).

44. The principle of the indivisibility of human rights was particularly relevant where racism was concerned. Discrimination against people because of their national origin or the colour of their skin went hand-in-hand with the loss of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. In recent years, a considerable number of Ecuadorians had gone to work in North America and Europe. It was incumbent on the host countries to protect migrant workers against racism and xenophobia. Many Ecuadorian nationals had complained of being treated in a discriminatory manner in international ports and airports. The fact that travellers from certain regions were systematically subjected to harassment at borders was inadmissible. The World Conference against Racism should study the concrete manifestations of racism and xenophobia, in particular against women.

45. The Secretary-General's report under Commission on Human Rights resolution 1999/78 (E/CN.4/2000/15) correctly observed that the three pillars of action to combat racism were legislative changes, information and the teaching of tolerance. That was the spirit in which Ecuador, which was a party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and whose Constitution and legislation contained provisions for combating racism and xenophobia, would participate in preparations for the World Conference.

46. Civil society and the NGOs should also take part in the combat to which he had referred. The major world religions also had a role to play. In that connection, sovereign pontiff John Paul II had set the example by asking forgiveness for the conduct of the Catholic Church in relation to the extermination of the Jews 50 years before.

47. Mr. SABHARWAL (India) said that in certain parts of the world racism cast a long shadow, permeating schools, neighbourhoods and the public administration, in particular the police, system of justice and the workplace. Racism could take violent forms, such as the murder of migrant workers. Simultaneously, xenophobia was reflected in national legislation relating to the right to asylum and the free movement of persons. Social and political groups freely propagated racial superiority, in particular through Internet. In addition, concepts of regional fortresses tended to generate a climate of distrust towards foreigners, who were regarded as rivals and a threat to local prosperity, culture and identity. The international community must first acknowledge the problem in all its complexity and then study its root causes, in particular economic, and take care not to confuse racism with other aspects of discrimination, as unfortunately was often the case.

48. Regarding measures to combat racism, he regretted that the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination had not yielded the expected results, for lack of momentum and finances. It was also a matter of concern that various activities planned for the World Conference were largely dependent on voluntary contributions.

49. He hoped that the World Conference would be instrumental in framing specific programmes to combat racism, particularly in the fields of education, culture and information. The Conference should reaffirm diversity and pluralism as values which enriched rather than undermined societies.

50. India would participate actively in the forthcoming preparatory meeting for the Conference, in which representatives of civil society should also be represented. The Commission must send a clear message to the international community to do everything in its power to make the Conference a success.

51. Ms. GUSYNINA (Russian Federation) said that she was in complete agreement with the Special Rapporteur's remark that racism, intolerance and ethnic rivalries affected all parts of the world and were taking on increasingly sophisticated forms.

52. As the High Commissioner for Human Rights had stated in one of her reports, racism was the product of the environment. With that in mind, her delegation found signs of racism in the developed democracies to be particularly distressing. To combat it, the masses must be educated in a spirit of tolerance and respect for national and ethnic diversity. The eradication of racial prejudices must become a priority for all countries without exception.

53. It was difficult to understand why the European Union countries reacted strongly to certain manifestations of nationalism while overlooking increasing chauvinism in countries which sought to join the Union. For example, on the eve of the fifty-fifth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, there were fascist demonstrations in central Europe once again, in the City Centre of Riga, Latvia, where former members of the Waffen SS had held a demonstration on 16 March 2000. That event again confirmed the will of certain Latvian circles to change the course of history. Russia had repeatedly drawn its European partners' attention to the threat represented by Riga's revisionist attitude.

54. Russia supported the work of the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Glèlè-Ahanhanzo, but could not accept the Rapporteur's endorsement, in his report, of the University of Tel Aviv conclusions to the effect that the authorities did not react to manifestations of anti-Semitism in Russia. The information furnished by the Russian Federation, included in the report, gave the lie to such conclusions. The Duma was preparing to consider a draft law prohibiting Nazi insignia and literature and amending the Penal Code of the Federation accordingly.

55. In addition, her delegation requested the Special Rapporteur to take up the case of States which had not submitted a report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination for several years.

56. Her delegation associated itself with all the delegations which believed that the future World Conference against Racism should take into account the concerns expressed at the current session of the Commission and devise concrete and effective means of combating the universal scourge of racism.

57. Mr. HASSAINE (Observer for Algeria) said that the world was witnessing the emergence of new and pernicious forms of racism, xenophobia and intolerance, on which certain politicians did not hesitate to base their programmes. They stirred up hatred of foreigners by holding them responsible for all the problems and difficulties of modern society. Graver still, others revived past rivalries among peoples, cultures and civilizations. The principle of "national preference" aimed in fact to legalize discrimination against not only emigrant communities but their descendants. That situation of marginalization and exclusion gradually pushed such communities towards ghettoization, with its potential for multiple forms of rebellion, including crime. It was distressing to note that racist speech and attitudes, especially by certain politicians, were becoming commonplace and were no longer condemned as they should be. Also on the rise were chauvinistic nationalism and forms of extremism which often had tragic consequences, examples being so-called ethnic cleansing operations.

58. The World Conference against Racism was of paramount importance in such a context. More than simply observe, it must plan concrete measures liable to combat racism, xenophobia and intolerance effectively.

59. It was also urgent for the international community to study the question of strengthening international protection for the victims of racism and xenophobia, who consisted essentially of migrant workers and their families. For that reason States which had not yet done so were invited to recognize the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to receive and consider communications from individuals or groups of individuals claiming to be victims of a violation based on race, sex or religion.

60. Mr. TARAN (Observer for the International Labour Organization) said that ILO had a long history of combating all forms of discrimination in employment, as indicated by the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), ratified by 141 States, which called for the elimination of any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin which had the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.

61. In addition to its standard-setting activities, ILO carried out educational and research activities aimed at changing behaviour in the workplace and ensuring international dialogue to improve the implementation of anti-discrimination measures.

62. In that context, ILO attached great importance to the preparations for the World Conference against Racism. It had launched a project entitled "Combating discrimination against (im)migrant and ethnic minority workers in the field of work" in 1991. ILO research had measured disturbing levels of discrimination in access to employment. In the last phase of the project, Governments, employers and workers from 14 Western European and North American countries had met to examine new approaches to combating racial discrimination and xenophobia. Observers for United Nations and regional intergovernmental organizations, national anti-discrimination monitoring bodies, NGOs and migrant groups had contributed to the debate. The measures developed through the high-level meeting would be an important contribution to the work of the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference against Racism.

63. Participants had also recommended that the United Nations treaty bodies, in particular the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, should pay particular attention within their respective mandates to the protection of migrant workers' rights. Representatives of participating intergovernmental organizations had agreed to convene an informal inter-agency working group on cooperation in anti-discrimination efforts.

64. Mr. KHORRAM (Observer for Iran) said that 50 years after the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the notion of white supremacy was once again giving rise to racism, racial violence, racial discrimination and incitement to racial hatred. Unfortunately, United Nations action to combat racial discrimination through the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Decades for Action to Combat Racism had not yielded the desired results. The Commission had consequently decided to convene the World Conference against Racism, to raise public awareness of that issue.

65. The international community and relevant organizations should take more coordinated measures to ensure that the regional preparatory meetings and the World Conference itself fulfilled their historical role in the anti-racism campaign. In particular, the regional meetings for Asia, Africa and Latin America should not be jeopardized for lack of financing. In resolution 1999/78, the Commission requested the Secretary-General, the United Nations specialized agencies and the regional economic commissions to provide financial and technical assistance for the organization of the regional preparatory meetings.

66. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which would host the preparatory meeting for Asia, warmly thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her efforts for the preparatory phase of the World Conference, and was prepared to extend her its full cooperation.

67. Mr. TEKLE (Observer for Eritrea) denounced the situation in Ethiopia, which was one of ethno-apartheid. The country was divided into administrative zones reminiscent of apartheid South Africa's Bantustans. Power was held by a single ethnic group, the people of Tigray, which had its own army and controlled the country's economic wealth.

68. Mr. ALEMU (Observer for Ethiopia), speaking on a point of order, said that the statement of the representative of Eritrea was not directed to the agenda item under review.

69. The CHAIRMAN asked the representative of Eritrea to direct his remarks to agenda item 6.

70. Mr. TEKLE (Observer for Eritrea) said that the minority group in power in Ethiopia had built up an extremely powerful army equipped with the most modern weapons, including landmines.

71. The CHAIRMAN noted that the foregoing remarks were unrelated to the agenda item under review.

72. Mr. ANOSHKO (Observer for Belarus) said that 22 per cent of his country's population, or one inhabitant out of five, belonged to different nationalities. The largest was the Russian minority, but there were also Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Tatars and Gypsies.

73. The situation of those minorities was characterized primarily by stability, in that there were no ethnic, racial or religious conflicts among the various groups. That stability was due to the policy of the State, which made every effort to enforce the law in all areas of society. The Belarusian Constitution also established equality among the members of all nationalities, prohibited incitement to racial hatred and recognized the right of everyone to use his or her own language. The Citizens' Act, adopted in 1991, enabled everyone living in the national territory to acquire Belarusian citizenship. Similarly, under laws also enacted in 1991, all minorities were able to develop their own culture, establish schools and cultural associations and provide education in their mother tongue. Finally, in 1992 a law on national minorities in Belarus had been adopted, giving legal definition to relations among the various nationalities. The different communities had participated actively in drafting the law.

74. The Republic of Belarus was a plurinational State where citizens enjoyed equal rights and were able to preserve their identity.

75. Ms. BHATTACH ARJYA (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) commended South Africa for its offer to host the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance; South Africa was a historically significant venue given the country's racist past.

76. She warned against the inappropriate use of the term "race", as there was only one race: the human race. Racism had a political and economic agenda, and the fact that it continued to grow meant that there were groups which gained from it and used it to perpetuate their privileges. In that context, Mr. Oloka-Olyango's working paper to the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on globalization in the context of racism (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/8) brought out the links between racism, capital and market laws.

77. Women, in particular women of colour, were the primary victims of racism, even more than men. Women of colour and indigenous women had made remarkable contributions to understanding the complex ways in which sexism and racism intersected. The preparations for

the World Conference should draw on those contributions and on the experience of the NGOs. She urged States to contribute generously to the Voluntary Fund for the World Conference, and to earmark a proportion of their contribution to ensure NGO participation. She hoped that NGOs in both consultative and non-consultative status would be involved in the preparatory process and that both governmental and non-governmental delegations attending the World Conference would be truly representative of the diversity of populations.

78. Mr. BITAR (North-South XXI) made a strong appeal on behalf of the children and unarmed civilians who had been forced to leave their homes and had later been killed or maimed in the bombings of Lebanon while seeking refuge in a place where they had thought they would be safe. One of his own sons had perished in those bombings, another had been wounded and their mother had been maimed. He urged the Commission to put an end to the murders of civilians in Lebanon. He demanded justice and equity for children who asked nothing more than to live in peace. Military aeroplanes bombed their homes every day, the inhabitants were forced to leave and their fields burnt. It was imperative to ensure that armies actually withdrew from Lebanon by enforcing the resolution adopted on that issue 20 years earlier, which had never been applied. The daily shootings must be stopped, the victims of such atrocities, especially the orphans, must be helped and the children of Lebanon must be allowed to have normal lives.

79. Mr. GONZALES (International Indian Treaty Council) drew attention to insidious forms of racism and intolerance, especially towards indigenous peoples. He referred in that connection to the disproportionate application of executions to Indians in the United States. One example was the case of Darryll Rich, a Cherokee recently executed in California. Mr. Rich had sought authorization to participate in a traditional Indian purification ceremony before his execution, under conditions offering full security guarantees. He had been denied that solace, officially for security reasons, in an obvious manifestation of racism. No other last rites, whether Buddhist, Christian, Jewish or Muslim, had ever been known to be denied a condemned person by the State.

80. Following an investigation into the human rights of indigenous peoples in the United States, the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance had found that the United States had not been complying with its international obligations in relation to Native Americans. The Special Rapporteur would be playing an important role in the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. He urged the Commission and its Bureau to ensure that the World Conference on Racism addressed all aspects of racial discrimination and to allow those without a voice in their States a role in describing the daily practice of racism in all its forms and offering solutions.

81. Mr. AHMAD (World Muslim Congress) noted that signs of xenophobia were everywhere and that the shock of the Holocaust, which had caused the world to say, "Never again!", seemed to be losing its effectiveness. Evidence was everywhere: genocide in Rwanda, the decimation of 10,000 Muslim men in the United Nations safe area of Srebrenica, genocide in Kosovo, etc. Xenophobia had become a reality of life, and Islamophobia was one of its new offshoots. Ethnic cleansing had been joined by techniques of humiliation, the latest being male rape, whose devastating effects were obvious from the testimony of victims before the Hague Tribunal and those in Chechnya's filtration camps.

82. The will to annihilate the culture or religion of others was particularly striking in India, where Hindu organizations directly connected to the BJP, the political party in power, sought to "Hinduize" the other minorities and destroy their sacred monuments. The same was true in Yugoslavia, where 207 mosques had been destroyed in Serbian-controlled Bosnia. Similarly, in Kosovo, 600,000 volumes from the National Library in Pristina had been reduced to pulp by the Serbian authorities. In other regions of the world, xenophobic practices took other forms. For example, according to reports in the press, landlords in Norway were allowed to specify "Europeans only" when advertising apartments to let.

83. Xenophobia and other forms of discrimination were not new; they had simply become more violent. Some suspected a base human instinct responsible for hostility towards those belonging to other racial or ethnic groups. It was necessary to fathom the human psyche to identify the source of that instinct. He hoped that the World Conference against Racism to be held in 2001 would be able to accomplish that task.

84. Mr. GLELE-AHANHANZO (Special Rapporteur) said that he had listened with interest to the statements on agenda item 6. Members obviously wished the preparatory process to take place in a methodic, even scientific, manner, in order that concrete decisions might be taken in the different areas to be addressed at the Conference, namely education, the economy and the social sector. He urged States and donors to contribute to the funding for the Conference in order to make it as effective as possible.

85. Ms. JANJUA (Pakistan) referred to Commission resolution 1999/82, entitled "Defamation of religions", in which it had called upon the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance to take into account the provisions of that resolution when reporting to the Commission at its fifty-sixth session. However, there was no reference to that resolution in the Special Rapporteur's report. Her delegation hoped that the Special Rapporteur would correct that omission in future reports.

Rights of reply

86. Mr. MAHMOUD (Sudan) said that his delegation categorically rejected the allegations made by Mrs. Albright, Secretary of State of the United States of America, to the effect that slavery was practised in the Sudan. He referred to Commission resolution 1999/15 of 23 April 1999, which spoke of "abduction" rather than slavery. The National Committee for the Eradication of Abduction had been able, in the space of four months, to identify 700 children who had been reunited with their families. His delegation greatly appreciated the support and cooperation extended to it by the European Union, UNICEF, the Canadian Government and several international NGOs. If the United States administration was as concerned as it claimed to be, he called on it to assist the Sudanese Government in its efforts to eradicate that practice.

87. Mr. OULD SIDI HAIBA (Observer for Mauritania) said he wished to reply to the charges levelled at his country by the NGO "Agir Ensemble". The charges in question were totally false. Mauritania had never ceased to work for human rights and had a long-standing tradition of understanding and harmony among the different ethnic groups which made up the country. Mauritania had acceded to the international human rights instruments. It was a pluralist democracy which endeavoured to enforce the rule of law and which had an independent press.

Unfortunately, a group of Mauritanians working from abroad were spreading propaganda and lies and conducting activities harmful to the country. By its actions that fringe group excluded itself. Its negative attitude did nothing to advance the cause of human rights.

88. Mr. BAUMANIS (Latvia), referring to the statement made earlier by the representative of Russia, said that the case mentioned concerned a criminal act which had been punished as such. The perpetrator had been prosecuted not for his political convictions but for burning two families alive in their own houses in 1944.

89. The representative of Russia had also spoken of the 16 March gathering of Latvian war veterans. The event in question had not been recognized as official and there had been no Government or military participation. It had simply been a gathering of several hundred old men who had been illegally drafted by the Nazi regime in the last years of the war; all they had done was attend a church service and lay wreaths in a cemetery. At no point had they made any statements or displayed any symbols of fascism. Latvians had suffered under both Nazi and Soviet occupation, and had no reason to defend either totalitarian system.

90. At a time when Latvia was preparing to honour the memory of more than 40,000 Latvians deported to the Gulag on 25 March 1949, the Russian statement was particularly distasteful. The Russian people had made a definite contribution to combating fascism, but it did not seem to have fully overcome its Stalinist legacy. In the interest of Russia's future democracy it must face up to its past, namely the occupation of the Baltic States and the repression against their peaceful citizens.

The Chairman declared the debate on agenda item 6 closed.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.